


THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

PRINCIPAL A. J. TAIT, D.D.

The Short Course Series.

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THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

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GENERAL PREFACE

THE title of the present series is a sufficient indication of its purpose. Few preachers, or congregations, will face the long courses of expository lectures which characterised the preaching of the past, but there is a growing conviction on the part of some that an occasional short course, of six or eight connected studies on one definite theme, is a necessity of their mental and ministerial life. It is at this point the projected series would strike in. It would suggest to those who are mapping out a scheme of work for the future a variety of subjects which might possibly be utilised in this way.

The appeal, however, will not be restricted to ministers or preachers. The various volumes will meet the needs of laymen and

General Preface

Sabbath-school teachers who are interested in a scholarly but also practical exposition of Bible history and doctrine. In the hands of office-bearers and mission-workers the "Short Course Series" may easily become one of the most convenient and valuable of Bible helps.

It need scarcely be added that while an effort has been made to secure, as far as possible, a general uniformity in the scope and character of the series, the final responsibility for the special interpretations and opinions introduced into the separate volumes, rests entirely with the individual contributors.

A detailed list of the authors and their subjects will be found at the close of each volume.

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THE PROPHECY OF MICAH

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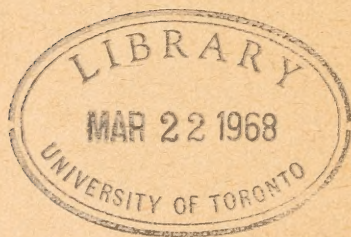
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O ETERNAL TRUTH, and True Love, and Loving Light, our God and our All, enlighten our darkness by the brightness of Thy light ; that in Thy light we may see light, that we, in turn, may enlighten others, and kindle them with the love of Thee. Open Thou our eyes, that we may see wondrous things out of Thy law. . . . Grant to us . . . that we may be preachers of heaven, sowers for eternity, that they who read may, by the knowledge of Thy Scriptures, through the graveness and the weight of Thy promises and threats, despise the ensnaring entanglements of earth, and be kindled with the love of heavenly goods and the effectual earnest longing for a blessed eternity. This be our one desire, this our prayer, to this may all our reading and writing and all our toil tend, that Thy Holy Name may be hallowed, Thy Holy Will be done, as in heaven, so in earth, Thy Holy Kingdom of grace, glory, and endless bliss, where Thou wilt be all things in all, may come to us. Amen.

PUSEY.

I

THE WORD OF THE LORD

MICAH i. 1.

I

THE WORD OF THE LORD

I. REVELATION.

THERE was a time when the familiar phrase with which the Book of Micah begins would have been accepted without question. To-day it challenges thought. To some the change of attitude in respect of the Divine element in Holy Scripture is an offence, to others it has meant salvation from unbelief; but whichever way it is, we have to recognise the fact that we live in times of transition and new interpretation, and that transition inevitably involves unsettlement. The necessity is laid upon all alike in the present day of being prepared with a reasoned answer to the question, Is there such a thing as the word of the LORD? Must we cast on one side the idea

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of revelation, as part of the childish thought which was good enough for a past age, but cannot survive the searching criticism of our own day ?

To this question we must reply that God and revelation are complementary terms : both reason and experience lead us to this position. Reason demands that God must be the perfection of all that is good and noble and true ; but it would be impossible to maintain belief in such perfection, if it were imagined that God has left His moral creatures in darkness and ignorance, either in respect of Himself and His will, or in respect of their own duty and destiny. Reason cannot rest satisfied with a conception of God from which the idea of revelation is eliminated.

And this postulate of reason is supported by the testimony of experience ; for amongst moral beings fatherhood, which is true to its name, involves self-manifestation to the offspring. A man who allows his child to grow up in ignorance of him has denied the most elementary conception of fatherhood.

The Word of the Lord

Such a man is not a true father ; he behaves in a manner which we speak of as unnatural. And the higher we look in the scale of virtue, the more confidently do we expect to find intercourse between father and child.

Since, then, God is the supreme Father, the creator of moral beings, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named ; since, moreover, He is at the same time the perfection of goodness (for this is as essential an element in the conception of God as Fatherhood is), it is as certain as anything can be that God has revealed Himself. The fundamental problem of revelation is in reality a problem not for the Christian, but for the unbeliever. The true form of the problem is not "How can a man believe that God has revealed Himself ?" but "How can a man justify his refusal to believe that God has revealed Himself ?"

It is possible to get rid of the problem by denying the existence of God ; but in that case a man must discover a philosophy of life which can dispense with the idea of an intelligent First Cause, he must eliminate

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from history all conception of an overruling Providence, he must find some means of doing away with the fact of Jesus Christ. Yet even Atheism is to be preferred to Agnosticism, for the conception that there may be God but nothing is or can be known about Him is condemned alike by reason and experience. If God is, then the word of God is to be found somewhere and somehow.

2. PROPHECY.

A prophet was a man through whom revelation was mediated. It mattered not what form the revelation took : it might be the interpretation of past experience, or the proclamation of present duty, or the preparation for future developments. In any case the prophet was the forth-teller of the message from the LORD. But while maintaining this larger and truer conception of the prophet's function as being the forth-teller rather than the foreteller, we must be on our guard against a capricious refusal

The Word of the Lord

to recognise the element of prediction in prophecy. Reaction from the fanciful exegesis of an earlier age has led us to think more readily of prophetic reflection upon the past than of prophetic prediction of the future. It is therefore necessary for us to remember that prediction had an established place in Israelite prophecy. If it were not so, the challenge so frequently addressed to idolaters that they should *declare the things that are to come hereafter* would have been meaningless.¹

Moreover, it is as reasonable to believe in prediction as an essential element of revelation as it is to regard revelation as an essential element in the conception of God. An alleged revelation of God which gave no indication of the things which were in store would on that very account have been open to suspicion. *Surely the LORD God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.*²

¹ Cf. Isa. xli. 22 ff., xlii. 9, xliii. 9, xliv. 7 f., xlv. 21, xlvi. 9 f., xlviii. 3 ff.

² Amos iii. 7.

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But let us return to the idea of the prophet as the forth-teller of the revelation of God. It was the word of the LORD which came to him. In other words, he was the messenger of God to the Church, not the messenger of the Church to her members. True, he was a member of the Church, and it was through his fellowship in her life that he was prepared for the reception of the revelation, but that fact gave to the Church no part or lot in the original mediating of the particular revelation. Again, the Church was in existence before the prophet was born; and after the delivery of his message and its committal to writing, the Church acted as the witness and keeper of the prophecy, yet this did not constitute the Church the author of the message. It was the word of the LORD which was thus written and preserved. The Church was the recipient, witness, and keeper of it, but not the originator. The language in which the message was expressed, the garb in which the truth was clothed, were suggested and provided by the times in

The Word of the Lord

which the prophet lived and by the circumstances of the prophet's life, but the inner meaning, the underlying idea, the enshrined truth, was of and from the LORD.

We have here the explanation of the genesis of one fragment of the Bible, but it is equally applicable to the other books of the Divine Library. The various portions of the Bible came into being because individual men were conscious that they had revelation to record, and the collections of writings which make up the two Testaments came into being because there was a general consciousness that the claim was valid.

The historians of Israel exhibit a consciousness that they are recording Divine revelation in history; the Psalmists give expression to the working of the Spirit in their meditations and aspirations; the Prophets write as men who are *media* of direct communication; the Evangelists manifest a conviction that they are recounting the life and teaching of the Incarnate Son of God; the Apostles write their Epistles with the claim made or im-

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plied that they are to the Church of the New Covenant what the Prophets were to the Church of the Old Covenant. Upon the whole volume the claim is stamped that its contents came to be written because the word of the LORD had come, whether directly through the action of the Spirit upon the mind of the writer, or indirectly through the Providential dealings which the writer was recording. God hath spoken—that is the source of confidence, the ground of appeal. It only remained for the Church to recognise the claim, to collect the writings so recognised, to preserve and transmit them as the records of revelation. This process did not constitute the Church the author of the writings; on the contrary, the writings were delivered to the Church, and are the supreme court of appeal by which her doctrine has to be tested.

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3. THE PROPHET.

The word of the LORD that came to Micah.

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, but the qualifications, opportunities, and outlook of the two men were different. Isaiah belonged to the aristocracy, Micah to the people : the one was a companion of princes, the other was a man of the countryside. Isaiah figured largely in the political life of the nation, Micah devoted himself to its social and religious problems. Isaiah's outlook embraced the destiny of the surrounding nations, Micah was absorbed by the interests of his own people.

The comparison provides us with an illustration of the Divine method which is referred to in Heb. i. 1. God spake *in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners*. He employed a variety of instrument and method to present the different aspects of truth and to fulfil different parts of His purpose. It was so in the past, and it is so still. Amos pro-

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claims the severity of offended Righteousness, Hosea gives voice to wounded Love. The Lord Jesus mixed with men as the friend of publicans and sinners, the Baptist was the rigorous ascetic, living in the solitary grandeur of the desert. The impetuous leader of men is pressed into the service, in the person of St. Peter; the possessor of a heart of tenderness and sympathy, in the person of St. Barnabas. The Jewish publican takes his place by the side of the Gentile physician as transmitter of the Gospel tradition. St. James urges the necessity of works, against the lifeless formalism of barren orthodoxy; St. Paul emphasises the centrality of faith in contrast with a reliance upon ceremonial activity. Thus it has always been, and thus will it continue to be: difference of qualification, difference of character, difference of position, difference of emphasis, but underlying all the diversity, unity of service, and presentation of the one revelation.

It was this fact of diversity in unity which St. Paul proclaimed in the face of the

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jealousies and division of the Church at Corinth.¹ On the one hand there is the one sovereign Spirit, and the one body into which He incorporates believers; on the other hand there is the diversity of gift and function which He assigns according to His will. Hence one of the first necessities for the servant of God is that he should recognise his own gift and function. This will guard him against despondency, when he finds others enjoying what he himself does not possess.² The next necessity, of no less importance, is that he shall recognise the gifts and functions of others. This will save him from exclusiveness and pride.³ And inasmuch as it is to service that the believer is called, and not to the enjoyment of privilege as an end in itself, there is yet a third necessity. Each must strive earnestly for the best gifts so that he may be of the utmost value to the body of which he has been made a member.⁴ But these three necessities do not

¹ 1 Cor. xii.

² *Ibid.* 14-20.

³ *Ibid.* 21-26.

⁴ *Ibid.* 27-31.

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make up the whole requirement for Christian service. Neither separately nor in combination do they constitute the life without which every other gift is rendered ineffectual.¹ And this gift which is the greatest of all gifts is offered to all alike. It is the gift of love, the very nature of God.² This each can possess, this each must possess, if he is to be of any real use for the service of God here, and to abide in the Presence of God hereafter.

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 1 ff.

² 1 St. John iv. 7 ff.

II

JUDGMENT

MICAH i. 2-16.

II

JUDGMENT

I. THE NECESSITY OF JUDGMENT.

THE acknowledgment of God carries with it not only a belief in revelation, but also the recognition of Providence. If we allow to the supreme Personal First Cause no directing hand in nature and in the actions of men, we ignore the demands of reason and experience as clearly as we do if we deny the possibility of revelation. For such a conception of God would be infinitely less reasonable than that of a true earthly father who takes no steps to order the circumstances and control the actions of his child. Indeed, it is through the controlling of the forces of nature, and the overruling of the actions of men, that we may expect the revelation of the character and the will of God to

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be in part vouchsafed. And it is in this co-operation of Providential control and spiritual influence that men have often found the clearest evidence of the Divine will and purpose. Instances of such co-operation come readily to mind in the processes and experiences which led to the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, and the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. We see it at work in the birth of Jesus when the fulness of the times had come. It was manifested in a no less remarkable manner in the sixteenth century, when the intellectual, social, and political movements of the West were made to serve the purposes of the spiritual revival to which that century gave birth.

In other words, the LORD God witnesses amongst men through Providence as well as through His word. It is to this fact that Micah calls attention at the very beginning of his message. *Hear, ye peoples, all of you ; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is : and let the LORD God be witness against you, the LORD from his holy temple.*

Judgment

The witness was to be catastrophic in its nature. *For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters that are poured down a steep place.*

Catastrophe, then, is interpreted as God's witness against the sin of men. The holiness of God when confronted with the iniquity of man must act as well as speak. The believer in Divine sovereignty will be ready to acknowledge this, and to interpret the experience when it comes. A mechanical conception of the universe blinds men's eyes to the witness of the events of life; it is for the prophet of the LORD to interpret them. We may not, of course, find an explanation of every event in the direct intervention of God, nor can we interpret all suffering as Divine protest against sin: if we were to attempt to do so, we should do violence to reason and experience. But as believers in moral government we must hold ourselves in

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readiness to relate our experiences to Divine sovereignty, and to see in history the working out of Divine purpose.

It fell to Micah's lot to prepare Judah and Israel for the immediate future, and to proclaim the significance of the coming catastrophe as the LORD's method of witnessing against the sin of His people. It was *for the transgression of Jacob*. It was no question of mere ignorance or infirmity, but of deliberate setting at naught of God's declared will. That is sin in its most hideous form. Man sets up his own will in opposition to the known will of God, and acts in disregard of His revealed commands. It is the qualitative rather than the quantitative element that determines transgression. We are reminded of this at the very beginning of the Bible. If sin were estimated quantitatively, the primitive story of the Fall would leave upon the mind a most disquieting conception of disproportion between the punishment and the offence. But, when the qualitative nature of sin is admitted, the teaching of that old

Judgment

story is seen to be enhanced by the very simplicity of the offence. For it is in the least significant choices of life that the will has the freest scope, and it is in the apparently unimportant actions that it finds its truest expression. Our Lord emphasised the same truth in His filling out of the Moral Law. Holiness and sin are essentially attitudes of mind and will. The attitude of opposition to the will of God is sin, and the expression of that attitude is transgression. This is the state of things to which Divine economy has to be accommodated; it is because of this that Divine intervention cannot limit itself to the manifestation of love; it is because of the sin of man that the still small voice has at times to speak of slaying with the sword, and to tell of judgment rather than of mercy.

2. THE TIME OF JUDGMENT.

Judah and Israel were guilty of persistent and deliberate transgression. They were in possession of sufficient knowledge of the

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LORD to enable them to understand His claims upon them; they knew that He was unwilling to give His glory to another; their experience had shown them that His claims to their allegiance were based upon His constant care of them; they were well aware that they owed their deliverance from Egypt and their possession of Canaan to His intervention in their behalf; yet in spite of it all they turned away to serve other gods; the centres of their religious and national life were made the headquarters of their idolatrous worship; they played the harlot (vers. 6, 7).

The reason of their apostasy is sufficiently indicated in the words, *She gathered it of the hire of an harlot*. Idolatry had seemed to them to offer the best advantages; they were out for worldly gain.

The imagery of playing the harlot corresponds to the figure under which God was represented as the Husband of His people.¹ Incidentally we may notice the applica-

¹ Cf. Ex. xxxiv. 15 f.; Deut. xxxi. 16; Hos. i. 2; Jer. xxxi. 32.

Judgment

tion of the figure in the New Testament to our Lord, after the manner in which so much of the earlier language used of the LORD God is applied to Him.¹ It is the unhesitating use of such language which affords the strongest evidence of the Apostolic conception of the Person of Jesus Christ, and indeed of His own claims. But to return to the Old Testament imagery, it would be difficult to find any language which could express more vividly the claims of God upon His people, and exhibit more clearly the terrible sin of idolatry. God had made Himself known to them, He had entered into covenant relationship with them, He had made that relationship a reality by His constant intercourse and love. His claim to their allegiance was based not merely upon the contract which they had accepted, but also upon His tender care of them and His strong interventions in their behalf. He had, moreover, made it clear to them at the outset

¹ Cf. St. Matt. ix. 15, xxv. 1; St. John iii. 29; Rev. xxi. 2, 9.

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that He would brook no rival. *I the LORD thy God am a jealous God* was part of the covenant revelation. Yet they had proved faithless; they had deserted Him and joined themselves to other gods.

It is unfortunate that the word "jealous" should have so deteriorated in meaning through the sinfulness of men as to indicate a quality to be deprecated and abjured. It was not always so;¹ and when we use the word to describe an attribute of God, we must rid our minds of those evil associations which man has gathered round it, and remember that it expresses an essential element of Deity. God cannot share His prerogatives with another; His claims are absolute. Our conception of God would vanish if we could think of Him as assenting to idolatry. The jealousy of God is an attribute which is essentially involved in His relation to His moral creation. And when His people are guilty of persistent repudiation of His claims, the jealousy of God inevitably expresses itself in judgment.

¹ Cf. 1 Kings xix. 10.

Judgment

Such was the state of things which Micah had to declare: the time had come when judgment was inevitable. *He r wounds are incurable* (ver. 9). The words remind us of the Divine lament voiced by Hosea (*when I would have healed Israel*),¹ and of the thwarted love of the Lord Jesus (*How often would I have gathered thy children . . . and ye would not*).²

Oh! the depths of the Divine condescension! God allows His love and power to be limited by the will of man. So it must be. The creation of beings in the image of God, and after His likeness, involved from one point of view Divine self-manifestation, inasmuch as the Divine nature was in part communicated to man; but from another point of view it involved Divine self-limitation, inasmuch as the will of man can say Him nay. And when judgment falls, it means that man has thwarted God's purposes of love for him; when the Almighty declares the wound incurable, it means not that God has not the will or power to save, but that man

¹ Hos. vii. 1.

² St. Matt. xxiii. 37.

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has used his God-given faculties to make his salvation impossible. The settled impenitent state can only result in judgment, for judgment is the sole remaining means of manifesting the Divine glory and vindicating the Divine character. The idea of judgment is as essential to the idea of God as is that of revelation. Creation is not a purposeless manifestation of energy, revelation is not a purposeless declaration of character, redemption is not a purposeless activity of love: and purpose inevitably involves judgment. The goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God cause postponement of judgment, but it is no more conceivable that they shall cancel ultimate judgment than it is that they shall obliterate man's will-power and reduce him to a machine. And if the purpose of God that His goodness shall lead men to repentance is rendered ineffective by man's hardness of heart and impenitence, nothing can save man from the day of wrath and of the righteous judgment of God.¹

¹ Rom. ii. 4 ff.

III

SIN

MICAH ii.

III

SIN

I. SIN AND CHARACTER.

AFTER a pictorial description of the judgment which was about to fall, the Prophet proceeds to portray in vivid language the state of moral and religious corruption in which the people were living. They were not the victims of circumstances: it was not upon sins of infirmity or ignorance that judgment was pronounced. The conduct of the people was the expression of a settled purpose. They did not stumble into sin; they invented it. Their case was not like that of the man who is suddenly confronted with temptation: they had cultivated the evil mind which *drags sin with cart-ropes*. They set themselves to devise evil: they even denied themselves sleep in order to

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plan it. The last hours of consciousness were given up to it, the last hours of darkness were spent upon it, the early morning light saw them at work on it. So low had public opinion fallen that evil had no need to resort to its usual plan of operating in the dark : there was no reason for it to refrain from coming to the light.¹ There was nothing to restrain the workers of it but the limits of their own opportunity and ability. They carried out whatever was *in the power of their hand* (ver. 1).

Before passing away from this statement of the process and environment of the people's wickedness, let us gather up some teaching about sin which the description suggests. That sin is essentially a matter of will we noticed in the foregoing chapter : here we get a warning, which emphasises the point, against a superficial estimate of our life. If the public opinion which constitutes our environment were lower than it is, if the society around us enforced no penalties, exercised no ostracism, im-

¹ Cf. St. John iii. 20.

Sin

posed no restraint, what would our conduct be ? This is a truer test of character than that which is afforded by mere examination of the things which we actually do. If we were to find a particular line of evil conduct in the power of our hand, so that we could practise it without let or hindrance, would we pursue it ? We can be thankful indeed, for the restraining influence of environment, we may lament rightly the flaunting of evil on the stage, in fiction, and in actual practice, which leads to any lowering of public opinion and to the withdrawal of the necessity for evil to dwell in the darkness, but we must be careful at the same time not to identify a mere conformity to environment, which may be only cowardice written large, with a character of innocence.

The important lesson which seems to emerge from this line of thought is that of the supreme necessity of character. We are challenged to the exercise of a certain independence of environment and to the cultivation of a self-disciplined will. We must see to it that our conduct is the

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expression of our own character and not a mere veneer of external impression.

It may be that we shall find here a ray of light cast upon the abandonment of conventional religion which is characteristic of our time. It is commonly said that men have ceased to be religious, but the truer explanation appears to be that conventional religion is disappearing. There are not fewer or less fervent God-fearing men than there used to be; on the contrary, the evidence of Christian activities seems to point to the very opposite. What has happened is that men now have it in the power of their hand to ignore the conventions of religion, churchgoing has largely ceased to be the thing to do, and the expression of religion is left to those who have the desire for it. It is manifest that this involves the withdrawal from the influences of institutional religion of many whose eyes might have been opened through it, or whose conduct at least might have been affected by it. On the other hand, there is this one gain, that religiousness and

Sin

religion have been drawn together more closely, there is less of the divorce between form and reality, there is more correspondence between conduct and character.

2. SIN AND PATRIOTISM.

One of the evils which were particularly pronounced amongst the contemporaries of Micah was covetousness; and this found its expression in robbery and violence (vers. 2, 8 f.). Now this was not merely an offence against the victims: it was also an offence against the national life. We remember the reason for Naboth's unwillingness to part with his vineyard for the gratifying of King Ahab's whim. *The LORD forbid it me that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.*¹ The attachment of an Israelite to his inheritance entered deeply into the national spirit: it was an important element in the patriotism of the people. Consequently the oppression of a *man and his house, even*

¹ 1 Kings'xxi. 3.

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a man and his heritage, was not merely the transgression of the law of conscience, it was also the doing despite to a national institution : it was an offence against patriotism.

This is an aspect of evil-doing which deserves attention. The effects of sin are not confined to the oppressor and his victim ; they reach a wider circle than that. Nor is it merely that the family circle of the evil-doer is involved in the shame and possibly the loss which the consequences of the action may involve. The effects reach further than that. Evil is an element of decay and corruption in the life of the nation, and the evil-doer must be branded as an offender against patriotism, one who lowers national ideals and weakens national spirit.

3. SIN AND THE GLORY OF GOD.

There is yet another and still more grievous aspect of sin which finds illustration in the language of Micah. The robbery of which so many of the people

Sin

were guilty was the robbery not merely of their fellow-men, but also of God. *From their children have ye taken away my glory for ever* (ver. 9). The prosperity of God's people is a matter which concerns His glory as well as their welfare. Can we not, for example, imagine the blasphemous taunts of the Philistines when they found themselves in possession of the Ark, whose presence in the camp of Israel they had so much dreaded? Yet on account of the sin of Israel, and for the sake of their education, God delivered His glory into the enemy's hand.¹ Have we not listened in thought to the scathing jeers of the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders when they saw the Holy Victim of their hatred nailed to the cross? *He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him.*² Yet because of man's sin there had to be that hour and the power of darkness. Similarly when judgment fell

¹ 1 Sam. iv. 1-11; Ps. lxxviii. 61.

² St. Matt. xxvii. 42.

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upon Judah, so that they had none to *cast a cord by lot*¹ in the congregation of the LORD, and His glory was taken away from their children for ever, it was not they alone who suffered : the LORD suffered with His people.²

This is an ancient conception of sin,³ but it is one which requires much more attention than it receives. Men must learn to view sin as the robbery of God, and to think of the judgment which has to fall upon God's children when they sin, as involving loss for the glory of God.⁴ It was this conception which in part accounted for the despondent cry of the Psalmists when they witnessed and shared in the sufferings of God's people,⁵ and for their prayer of imprecation against their enemies, who were also the enemies of God.⁶ The cry and the prayer alike were expressions

¹ See Neil, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, p. 92.

² See also ch. iii. 12.

³ Cf. Ps. lxxix.

⁴ A good illustration of the point is provided in the story of Achan. Cf. Josh. vi. 19, vii. 21 ff.

⁵ Ps. lxxiii.

⁶ Ps. lxxxiii.

Sin

of yearning for the vindication of God's character, and for the manifestation of His glory. They looked for the complete exhibition of Divine righteousness and judgment on this side of the grave, and therefore for a marked distinction of prosperity and adversity for the friends and the enemies of God. Consequently any reversal of this experience involved a clouding over of the glory of God, and led to the fervent prayer to God to vindicate Himself. We of the New Covenant are able to think differently about suffering and judgment. At the same time the principle remains that the glory of God is involved in the actions and experiences of men. Sin is still a coming short of the glory of God, the failures of God's people are still occasions for the blaspheming of the word of God, judgments which fall upon the Church still have the appearance of disasters for the cause of God. The removal of the candlestick will always be the withdrawal of a means of light.¹

¹ Rev. ii. 5.

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4. SIN AND UNBELIEF.

Let us notice, in closing, the intimate connection that there is between moral corruption and spiritual blindness. The men whose minds were set on violence and robbery were the men who accepted as their prophets advocates of wine and strong drink (ver. 11). How could it have been otherwise? If belief is to be anything more than mental assent, it must be accompanied by sympathy. Faith is an activity of heart and will as well as of mind. It is only the pure in heart who can see God;¹ it is only those who have been born anew who can see the kingdom of God;² it is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness.³ These are not expressions of a capricious decree, but of a natural law. Faith involves sympathy with its object. Unbelief may be honestly intellectual, but it may also be dishonest

¹ St. Matt. v. 8.

² St. John iii. 3.

³ Rom. x. 10.

Sin

and immoral. And when the roots of unbelief are embedded in immorality, argument and appeal to the intellect are vain. The only remedy is that of a changed heart. And when the appeal of love has been spurned, the only hope that remains is the fire of catastrophe.

IV

RESPONSIBILITY

MIKAH iii.

IV

RESPONSIBILITY

A NEW section of the Prophecy begins at the third chapter ; and Micah's attention is now turned to the leaders of the people. He addresses himself first to their civil rulers, the *princes of the house of Israel*, and then to their spiritual guides, the prophets. In each case the same note is struck : privilege involves obligation, and obligation involves responsibility. The failure of the rulers to fulfil their obligations rendered them responsible for the corruption of the people.

I. THE PRINCES AND RULERS.

What was the obligation which rested upon the civil leaders ? It was *to know judgment*. This does not mean that they

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had to be experts in legal technicalities. Such knowledge and experience might have been expected in the judges of the people, but it is not in view in this phrase, *to know judgment*. Nor does it mean that they were expected to understand the broad principles of justice, though this was certainly a necessary condition of their office. The word *know* is used here in the sense of heart-knowledge. It implies a special interest in, sympathy with, devotion to the object so known; it practically amounts to love.¹ Again, the word *judgment* here means more than verdict, decision, law: it carries with it the idea of right verdict, correct decision, just law. The whole phrase *to know judgment* signifies to love justice, to see that law is fairly administered. This was the obligation which was involved in the position, knowledge, and privilege of the civil heads of Israel; but it was unfulfilled. They set the example of oppression, injustice, and violence: the condition of the

¹ For this use of *know*, cf. Deut. ii. 7; Hos. xiii. 5; Amos iii. 2; Nah. i. 7; 2 Tim. ii. 19.

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people was but the reflection of the character of their leaders.

And what was the punishment which would be meted out to them? In their hour of need they would cry unto the LORD, but He would not hear them: they would turn to Him for help and deliverance, but He would hide His face from them. Their own conduct was to determine the nature of their punishment. The same law would apply to the rulers as to the people generally. The people had oppressed the weak among them, and had laid violent hands upon their possessions: their punishment would be that they themselves would be violently dispossessed of their ill-gotten gains.¹ *Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest*, was the cry of expulsion which would reach their ears. Similarly the rulers who had often turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of the oppressed, and had hid their faces from those who cried to them for justice, would now find that in their own hour of need their entreating

¹ Ch. ii. 4 f., 10.

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of the LORD would be of no avail, and that He would hide His face from them.

But there is more in the Prophet's denunciation of the rulers than a statement of correspondence between their sin and the punishment which was to ensue: it throws light upon the condition of effectual prayer. Sin separates man from God, and, when persisted in, disqualifies a man for access to the throne of grace. It is the prayer of the righteous man that availeth much. *The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. . . . The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*¹ Under the New Covenant it is prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus to which the promises are given; and prayer in the name of Jesus means that the man who so prays shows the character of Jesus, accepts the standpoint of Jesus, adopts His outlook

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 15 ff.

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upon life and the world, and in heart and will is in general sympathy with Him. There is no promise of answer to the mere offering of petition. And yet how many there are who neglect God until the hour of affliction comes, and then cry to Him for deliverance, and blaspheme because no relief is granted. Such men must be told that there are conditions of effectual prayer which can only be fulfilled by those who are sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

2. THE PRIESTS AND THE PROPHETS.

The ecclesiastical and religious leaders of the people were in no better case than the civil rulers : they used their influence and position for the purpose of leading the people astray. They were sinners against the light. They were not good-intentioned men who had unwittingly followed error and led others after them. They were not pioneers paying the penalty of experimental work in the early stages of thought and practice. They had nothing of the nobility

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of aim and courage of conviction which went so far to counterbalance the errors of many leaders of thought in the Christian Church, whom we are accustomed to regard as heretics. These prophets of Judah belonged to a totally different category. Their God was their belly. If men fed them, they were prepared to live at peace with them, and to encourage them in any line of action which they wished to follow : if men refused to give them what they wanted, they set up intrigue against them, they sanctified war against them (ver. 5, R.V.mg.), they cast a cloak of sacred duty over organised attack upon them.

And what was their punishment to be ? Once again we can perceive a principle of correspondence. As they had chosen not to see the light, so now the possibility of seeing would be removed. As they had chosen to live by bread alone, so now there was to be a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. *It shall be night unto you that ye shall have no vision ;*

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*and it shall be dark unto you that ye shall not divine. . . . And the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners confounded ; yea, they shall all cover their lips : for there is no answer of God.*¹ Just as sin had caused a separation between the rulers and God in respect of their petitions being answered, so the sin of the prophets had caused a separation between God and them in respect of vision and message.

3. THE TRUE PROPHET.

Following immediately upon the description of the blindness and spiritual bankruptcy of the false prophets, there comes, in striking contrast, a picture of the prophet of the LORD (vers. 8-12). His is a voice with authority, the authority which is born of the consciousness of a will surrendered to God and of a personality energised by the Spirit of the LORD. Micah is full of power, judgment, and might for the purpose of his ministry.

¹ Vers. 5-7 ; cf. Amos viii. 11.

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The claim reminds us of the boldness of St. Paul: *God has given to us the spirit of power and love and discipline.*¹ There is nothing presumptuous in such a claim. It is the response of faith to Divine promise, the answer of a good conscience to Divine revelation, the confidence which comes through the experience of Divine power. No man can be the prophet of the LORD unless he be conscious of Divinely given power and judgment for the purpose of his ministry. It is an axiom of ministerial work that God's calling is God's enabling.

And what was the purpose for which Micah had received power? It was to *declare unto Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin* (ver. 8). The sense in which the words are to be taken is evident from the message which follows them. It was the proclamation of the responsibility of the leaders for the judgment which was about to fall. The time for repentance had passed: the prophet's work now was to interpret the impending catastrophe.

¹ 2 Tim. i. 7.

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All were wallowing in the mire of covetousness. Princes, priests, prophets were all alike tarred with the same brush. Reward, hire, money were the only things for which they lived, and they supplied the only incentives to their activity. And with it all there was a deadly self-deception: *yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us* (ver. 11). They ignored the law of human co-operation, the principle of correspondence. Promises which were intended to be the ground of confidence for a people who truly served the LORD were interpreted as guarantees of an absolute inviolability and an unconditional immunity from trouble. The ceremonial and institutional bond between the LORD and the people was accepted as a substitute for the moral and spiritual union. And now they were to learn through punishment the lesson of their responsibility. For their sake, that is to say, because they had sinned and in order that they might be purified through the fire of chastisement, Zion, the

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city of their God, the inviolable city, was to be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem was to become heaps, and the mountain of the house was to be as the high places of a forest (ver. 12).

What a warning for God's people for all time! The glory of the LORD is in our hands as truly as are our own welfare and salvation. The promise given to the Christian Church of permanence and ultimate victory over the gates of Hell is entirely compatible with the overthrow of any particular church or the downfall of any particular empire. God's word will not return to Him void, but His method of fulfilling it allows for the co-operation of man. For man's sake He may at any time allow His glory to suffer eclipse: indeed, it may be that the only means whereby He can ultimately accomplish His purpose is that He shall for a time deliver His glory into the enemy's hand.

V

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

MICAH iv.



V

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

MAN may prove faithless, but God's purpose will not fail. His power and sovereignty will be vindicated even if accommodation to man's sin requires that His glory shall be temporarily hidden. This is the triumphant message introduced by the *but* which stands at the beginning of the fourth chapter of the prophecy. *The mountain of the house shall be as the high places of the forest. But in the latter days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills ; and peoples shall flow unto it.*

I. FAITH AND HOPE.

It is the confidence that God's word will not return to Him void that enables

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the believer to triumph in the hour of apparent defeat, and to be a man of hope in the midst of circumstances which seem to preclude hope. It was in the strength of this confidence that Abraham was able in hope to believe against hope, being fully assured that what God had promised He was also able to perform.¹ It was the same confidence which rendered him willing to offer up Isaac at God's bidding; for he was persuaded that God's promise in Isaac would be fulfilled even if it involved a resurrection from the dead.²

This faith of Abraham, which is presented to us as the example for all time,³ was not blind credulity, but an attitude towards God which was based upon experience. From the first recorded exercise of his trust in God, when he left his home and kindred, Abraham advanced from faith to faith, until he was able to face that supreme trial when God proved him by the command to offer up Isaac. Each step involved an

¹ Rom. iv. 18 ff.

² Heb. xi. 17 ff.

³ Rom. iv. 24.

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experience which prepared him for the next.

We do not know enough of Micah's early life to be able to say that his faith was similarly based upon his own experience : but in so far as it was exercised in respect of his nation's future, we can well believe that he found the ground of it in the nation's history. Israel had not been chosen out from among the nations of the world for nothing. The birth of the nation had been as clearly the fulfilment of Divine promise as the birth of Isaac had been. Moreover, the history of the nation had been one long record of the manifestation of Divine purpose and power. And it was impossible for one who believed that, to think of Zion as destined for permanent destruction, or to regard Israel as marked out for permanent rejection. Chastisement there might be, but not annihilation. The destruction could only be a stage in the process of evolution, the pulling down could only be a condition of building up, the ploughing could only be the prelude to harvest.

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The same assurance underlies Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant. Even though God's chastisement of His rebellious people should result in their decimation, and though the remaining tenth should again be eaten up, there would still be left the holy seed to be the stock from which the nation should revive.¹ Similarly St. Paul was able to distinguish the institutional Israel from the true Israel of God ; and he never lost his confidence that God's promises would be fulfilled for the remnant according to the election of grace.²

Whether it be Abraham or Micah or Isaiah or St. Paul, such was the confidence in the faithfulness of God that they one and all in hope believed against hope ; they kept their eyes fixed steadfastly upon God's revealed purpose ; they measured possibility by the standard of Divine power.

It is not surprising therefore to find the dark pictures of sin and judgment lit up by bright visions of the future. We are not

¹ See Isa. vi. 13, x. 20, xi. 11 ff. ; cf. Mic. iv. 7.

² Rom. xi. 5.

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prepared to rule out chapter ii. 12 f. of this prophecy as involving an impossible sequence of thought with ii. 1-11. On the contrary, the picture of judgment appeals to us with all the more force as a message from God because it ends with the vision of hope. Precisely the same phenomenon is presented in this fourth chapter, and in Isaiah's use of the same language.¹ We meet it again in the seventh chapter. In each case there is the juxtaposition of disappointment and hope, judgment and mercy, denunciation and promise: and that juxtaposition cannot be rightly interpreted unless allowance is made for the prophet's religion. It represents the triumph of faith over circumstances, and that triumph is the privilege and the right of every man who honestly trusts in the LORD.

2. THE VISION OF THE FUTURE.

We turn now to the actual picture which the Prophet gives of the ultimate destiny

¹ Isa. ii. 1 ff.

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of Zion. The city is to become the centre of worship for many peoples, and the Word of the LORD is to be the light of their life. The glory of the city is to be such that it will attract to itself the nations of the world, eager to learn its secret. The result will be that the God of Israel will be acknowledged as the light of the world, war will cease, peace and safety will be the happy lot of all mankind. By a bold imagery the nations of the world are represented as a river flowing upwards to the mountain of the LORD's house. Is this the prophet's vivid and picturesque equivalent of the Gospel word, *the things which are impossible with men are possible with God*? It may be so.

When the vision is compared with the later conception of Zephaniah, *men shall worship him, every one from his own place*,¹ and with that of Malachi, *From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto*

¹ Zeph. ii. 11.

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*my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the LORD of hosts;*¹ when viewed in this relation, Micah's vision is seen to be a limited one. And yet it was a distinct advance towards the Gospel revelation of the Catholic Church, and the worship which was to be in spirit and in truth. Micah perceived the fundamental truth that the LORD was not the God of Israel only, but the God of all the earth; and that therefore all men must come to know Him, and Jerusalem, in spite of her faithlessness and failure, was destined eventually to fulfil her mission to the world.

Let us pause here to inquire how far our conception of the faithfulness of God to His word carries us in our outlook upon the world at large. When the Lord Jesus gave His last command to His church, He gave it not as something entirely new and unforeseen, but as the fulfilment of Old Testament prediction. *It is written* was the ground upon which He based it.² As

¹ Mal. i. 11.

² St. Luke xxiv. 46 f.

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truly as His Death and Resurrection had been foretold, and as surely as they were realised in fact, so truly was the evangelisation of the world foretold, and so surely will it become a reality. Confidence in the faithfulness of God should make us fervent in the missionary enterprise of the Church. But the believer's outlook upon the world is determined by reason as well as by faith. For just as revelation is an essential element in our conception of God, so evangelisation is an essential consequence of belief in revelation. As long as there is true faith in God and joy in believing, for so long will believers communicate the good news to others. The command of the Lord Jesus is an appeal to the reason as well as a challenge to faith. But reason must go hand in hand with faith and love. Reason by itself might be deterred by the difficulties, silenced by the disappointments, dismayed by the cost. The incentive rests ultimately with faith and love : faith in God whose word shall not return to Him void, love for the Master who gave the command.

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3. FULFILMENT THROUGH SUFFERING.

Micah's conception of the faithfulness of God enabled him to interpret suffering as part of the process by which the sure mercies of God were being fulfilled. The very disaster which was to come upon the nation was to be the birthpangs of the new era of life and prosperity. True, it would inevitably call forth taunt and blasphemy from the enemies of the LORD: that was part of the sacrifice which sin involved. But the revilings would be uttered in ignorance: the time would come when the LORD would vindicate His truth and manifest His glory. A new theocracy would arise out of the afflictions of the nation. *In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven away, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever.*¹

¹ Mic. iv. 6 f.

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If Babylon was to be the instrument of the chastisement, it was Babylon which was also to be the place of deliverance. *Thou shalt come even unto Babylon: there shalt thou be rescued; there shall the LORD redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*¹ And the deliverance would affect not merely the daughter of Zion, but her oppressors as well. The city which has been ploughed as a field on account of her sin is now summoned to arise and thresh (magnificent paradox!): the harvest is gathered not by those who did the ploughing, but by the city which was ploughed. *They know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they His counsel: for he hath gathered them as the sheaves to the threshing-floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples: and thou shalt devote their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the LORD of the whole earth.*²

So may we learn the secret of Micah. The

¹ Mic. iv. 10.

² Vers. 12 f.

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ways of the LORD are past finding out, but His purposes will find a sure fulfilment. The supreme facts in life are the faithfulness and the sovereignty of the LORD.

VI
THE DIVINE METHOD

MICAH V.

VI

THE DIVINE METHOD

I. THE CHOICE

IN the fifth chapter of the prophecy there is a vivid portrayal of the method of the Divine intervention. The chosen time is manifestly an hour of crisis for the nation. Judah's foes are gathered round her, the city is besieged, her king is smitten. She has been given up to the sufferings of her travail. The chosen method is one which is entirely unexpected. In this respect, no less than in that of the time, human calculations are set at naught. God can achieve His purpose without Jerusalem; He can dispense with Jerusalem's King. An insignificant village is the quarter from which He raises up the instrument of His choice. *But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah,*

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which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth are of old, from everlasting.

The words *unto me* express the two ideas, chosen and called by me, and ready for my will and purpose. Here is the secret of success in the service of God. His method requires one who will do His will and act as His servant. It matters not who he is in respect of man's judgment, or whence he comes : the only requisites are the call of God and the obedience of man. Of such an one it is said, *his goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.* The words remind us of the description of the wisdom of God, given in Prov. viii. 22 ff. ; and they find their fullest meaning in the Eternal Person of the Word, who was made flesh. Indeed, this whole chapter of the prophecy demands Jesus Christ for the complete fulfilment of its wonderful message. But there was a primary and incomplete fulfilment in the person of King Hezekiah, who was of the seed of David. The reference to the

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Assyrian invasion requires this.¹ There is also a sense in which the comfort of the words is available as a ground of confidence for every chosen instrument of God. The *goings forth from of old, from everlasting* refer, in this subordinate sense, to the eternal plan and counsel of God. Thus, when the call came to Jeremiah, he was encouraged by the message that before he was born he had been known, sanctified, and appointed by the LORD a prophet unto the nations.² A similar idea underlies the message of the *Servant of the LORD* in the Book of Isaiah: *the LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. . . . The LORD formed me from the womb to be his servant.*³ We meet with it again in St. Paul's conception of God having separated him from the time of his birth.⁴

But it is not only in connection with the call to ministry that this confidence may be enjoyed. The eternal purpose of God is

¹ Ch. iv. 5 f.

² Jer. i. 5.

³ Isa. xlix. 1, 5.

⁴ Gal. i. 15.

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set before us also in respect of the call to salvation, as a ground of assurance for all believers. Thus St. Paul speaks of God's grace as having been given to us from eternity, the Incarnation being the manifestation in time of the eternal gift.¹ St. Paul thanks God that He has chosen believers from the beginning unto salvation;² and he carries his thoughts about the work of grace back to the foreknowledge of God.³ This is the practical comfort of the revealed truth of Predestination. Grace manifesting itself in the call whether to ministry or to salvation, and experienced through the response of the surrendered will, is the evidence of eternal purpose. Of all such it can be said that their *goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*. This is the confidence which is enjoyed by the children of God: it is based not upon human calculations, but upon the eternal purpose of God; and it depends upon the recognition of the fact that the Divine method is

¹ 2 Tim. i. 9.

² 2 Thess. ii. 13.

³ Rom. viii. 29.

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not bound by human standards of judgment.

What a wealth of illustration of this truth the recorded history of God's ancient people provides! The birth of Isaac,¹ the experiences of Joseph,² the choice of David,³ the call of Amos,⁴ the call of Jeremiah,⁵ readily come to mind in this connection. And was not the Lord Jesus Himself, in respect of His earthly circumstances, the most wonderful example of it? Indeed, across the whole history of Divine dealings with man there can be written, *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*⁶

The articulate expression of the method is given by St. Paul. *Ye behold your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things*

¹ Gen. xvii. 17, xviii. 12.

³ Ps. lxxviii. 67 ff.

⁵ Jer. i. 4 ff.

² Ps. cv. 17.

⁴ Amos vii. 14 f.

⁶ Isa. lv. 8.

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*of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong ; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are.*¹

2. THE PURPOSE.

We are indebted to St. Paul not merely for this statement of the Divine method, but also for what is of no less importance, the explanation of the purpose. This he describes negatively and positively : negatively it is that *no flesh should glory in his presence* ; positively, *he that glorieth, let him glory in the LORD.*²

Sympathy with the purpose is the surest road to loyalty to the method. It was because St. Paul perceived and rejoiced in the purpose, that he devoted himself to the foolishness of preaching as the means of man's salvation, and was determined to

¹ I Cor. i. 26 ff ; cf. St. Matt. xi. 25.

² I Cor. i. 29, 31.

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know nothing among men but *Jesus Christ, and him crucified*.¹ It was on this account that he refused to be deterred by his own weakness, fear, and much trembling, and that he abjured the persuasive words of wisdom. It was because he knew that glorying was excluded that he perceived the reasonableness of the revealed truth that man is justified by faith and not by works.² The first secret of co-operation with God, whether in the matter of salvation or of service, is the acceptance of this principle. When a brilliant young controversialist feels himself at liberty to pour contempt upon those who rejoice in the doctrine of Justification by faith, and to compare them with the man in the Parable who hid his pound in the napkin, he renders himself an object of pity. He has allowed his wisdom to blind him to the meaning of faith; and, what is still worse, he has revealed himself as being out of sympathy with the revealed method of grace. Faith assuredly involves

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

² Rom. iii. 27, iv. 1 ff.; Eph. ii. 8 ff.

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co-operation, otherwise it is not faith; but it is equally certain that the faith which God requires from man will find the ground of its glorying only in the LORD.

3. THE RESULT.

The Divine intervention issues in deliverance for Judah. The captives are restored, true religion is established, and peace is enjoyed (vers. 3-6). But this is not all. Salvation and service are complementary terms: men are saved to serve. *Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation*, is only one part of the song of the redeemed; it continues, *and madest them to be a kingdom and priests*.¹ Even so it is during the earthly stage of the process of redemption: *we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them*.² There was no exemption from this law for Judah; her blessing was not intended

¹ Rev. v. 9 f.

² Eph. ii. 10.

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for her selfish enjoyment. She had a mission to fulfil in relation to the nations of the world. She was to be *in the midst of many peoples as dew from the LORD, as showers upon the grass* (ver. 7). The imagery was of far greater significance for the people of Palestine than it can be for us,¹ but even we have no difficulty in understanding it to mean life. The restored people were to be the means of life to others, partly through the quiet and subtle effect of influence, represented by dew, and partly through the more perceptible and consciously exerted ministry of the word, represented by the showers. They were not to be deterred in this ministry by any unwillingness on the part of the nations. The blessing was to be offered to them whether they would receive it or refuse it. Just as God causes His rain to fall upon the earth without any respect of men, so that *it tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men*, even so was this God-given enterprise of Judah to be

¹ See Neil, *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, pp. 115, 169.

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carried out. But there was another aspect of the mission : it was to be destructive as well as life-giving. Judah was to be amongst the nations *as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep ; who, if he go through, treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and there is none to deliver* (ver. 8). To those who submitted themselves the mission would be the means of life, but to those who opposed themselves it would be a mission of death.

The same conception finds expression in St. Paul's words, *We are a sweet savour of Christ unto God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing ; to the one a savour from death unto death ; to the other a savour from life unto life.*¹ It is present likewise in the words with which the Lord Jesus commissioned the Church to be in the world for the remitting and the retaining of men's sins.²

What this means in actual experience we can see in the work of Christian missions. The preaching of Christ is the offering to

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 15 f.

² St. John xx. 21 ff.

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men of the choice between life and death. The fact that He is the light of the world means that men are being automatically judged as they either believe in Him or reject Him.¹ And further, Christian teaching and civilisation exercise inevitably a destructive as well as a constructive influence. The old civilisations give way before them, and idols are torn down from their seats, while at the same time all who turn to the LORD are quickened and renewed.

But there is one essential condition for the fulfilment of the mission: Judah herself must first be purified. This thought which was present in the earlier description of the nation's sufferings receives articulate expression at the end of the chapter. *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and will destroy thy chariots: and I will cut off the cities of thy land, and will throw down all thy strongholds: and I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand;*

¹ Cf. St. John iii. 18 ff.

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*and thou shalt have no more soothsayers :
and I will cut off thy graven images and thy
pillars out of the midst of thee : and thou
shalt no more worship the work of thine
hands. And I will pluck up thine Asherim
out of the midst of thee : and I will destroy
thy cities.*¹

¹ Ch. v. 10 ff.

VII
THE DIVINE PLEADING

MICAH vi.

VII

THE DIVINE PLEADING

ONCE again the earth is summoned as a witness of God's dealings with His people.¹ The mountains and hills are bidden to listen while He pleads and vindicates the righteousness of His acts. What a soul-stirring conception! *The LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.* Nothing shall be left undone which may avert the impending judgment. The people will have only themselves to blame if the language has to be changed to that of Hosea, *The LORD hath a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways.*² But before that pronouncement is made, He will plead, yes, plead with His wayward and rebellious children. What infinite tenderness, compassion, and love!

¹ Cf. ch. i. 2.

² Hos. xii. 2.

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The Lord of all, the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, who has revealed Himself and declared His will, now pleads with the men who have scorned His love and ignored His word. The pleading cannot continue for ever, the controversy must have a definite issue, the Spirit will not always strive with men. When Hosea was prophesying to the Northern Kingdom, the day of grace was over, the controversy sealed the doom of Ephraim. But here Micah is still offering to the Southern Kingdom the opportunity of repentance. The LORD through His prophet is content still to plead.

I. THE CHALLENGE.

The message begins with a challenge. *O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.* Would that men would allow themselves to listen to this challenge, and to come into judgment with God before the bar of reason and experience. If only

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they were willing to testify to God's dealings with them, there would be some profitable heart-searching. True, Israel had not been free from trial and suffering ; but whose fault was that ? On the other hand, the prophet was able to remind them that God had delivered them from bondage, had led them through the wilderness, had preserved them from the devices of their enemies. It was one long record of patient and unceasing effort for their welfare.

The challenge comes to men to-day with a force which was impossible in Micah's day. He could recall the fact that God had sent before Israel Moses, Aaron, and Miriam : the preacher of the gospel can proclaim the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.

The challenge of the Cross is God's answer to men's challenge of His love. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?*¹ When we

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

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are confronted with the trials and sufferings of life, let us not look at man, and ask, Why did God endow him with the power of free will ? though the answer would be reasonable that it was Love which so created him. Let us not look at the consequences of man's sin, and ask, Why did God not cancel the power of free will and reduce man to a machine ? though the answer would be reasonable that it is Love which has preserved him as he is. Let us not look at the sufferings, and ask, Why does God permit them ? though the answer would be reasonable that Love is working out purposes which we do not yet perceive. But let us look at Calvary's Cross, and then see whether anything remains in which we are prepared to testify against God.

That is God's challenge to men now. *God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*¹ Does any man require more proof than this ? If so, let him be shown the wonder of Divine Love, which is manifested

¹ Rom. v. 8.

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in the fact that God still pleads with him. *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses. . . . Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf ; that we might become the righteousness of God in him,*¹ that is the one marvel of Divine Love. *We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us : we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God,* that is the other. Having reconciled man to Himself at the cost of so great a sacrifice, God continues to plead with man to be reconciled to Him. Calvary's Cross is the Divine challenge to the doubt and ingratitude of men.

2. THE REPUDIATION.

Micah now proceeds in the form of question and answer to set forth the LORD's requirements (vers. 6-8). There was a false as well as a true conception, and the prophet refers to both.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 19 ff.

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The divergence is as modern as it is ancient. It arises out of the fact that religion has always been institutional as well as experimental, and has demanded expression in rite and ceremony as well as in character and conduct. There has consequently been a perpetual conflict between the two expressions for the position of supremacy. Man and the Sabbath are both Divine creations, but the ways in which they were related by the Lord Jesus, on the one hand, and by the Pharisees, on the other, were entirely different. *The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath* was the Lord's answer to the institutionalists of His day, who made their religion consist primarily in ceremonial observances.¹

The abuse of institutionalism is the most subtle cause of the decay of true religion. It offers a substitute for the harder service of mind and will. The ethic of the thing done is allowed to take the place of the ethic of the clean heart, means are con-

¹ St. Mark ii. 27.

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founded with ends, and religion is lost in religiousness.

It was this that caused the ceaseless conflict between prophet and priest under the Old Dispensation, and led to the constant stream of Prophetic protest against the misuse of ordinance and ceremony.¹ Institutions and ceremonies, whose Divine appointment was part of the accepted creed of the time, were nevertheless condemned by the prophets as being not merely useless but positively abhorrent in the sight of God. Sacrifices, offerings, fasts, incense, festivals, were all alike disowned by the messenger of the LORD. It was not that the people were wrong in regarding them as Divinely appointed elements of their religion, but that they had allowed religion to consist in these institutions as its heart and centre. They had come to regard the bond between the LORD and themselves as a matter of rite and ceremony, whereas all

¹ See 1 Sam. xv. 22; Isa. i. 10 ff.; Jer. vi. 20, vii. 21 ff.; Hos. vi. 6; Amos v. 21 ff.; Mic. vi. 7 ff.; cf. Ps. l. 8 ff., li. 16 f.

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the time it had to be a matter of heart and life. This was the reason why Zion was to be ploughed as a field, and the Temple razed to the ground. By the hard discipline of the Captivity the people were to be taught the true proportion of things. And yet, such is the proneness of the human heart to substitute the outward for the inward, the lesson was only too soon forgotten, and in our Lord's time the institutional side of religion had become as strongly centralised again as ever it had been in the days of the monarchy. The holy city which was steeped in religiousness, and whose temple courts were crowded with worshippers, caused tears to flow from the eyes of the Saviour, because it knew not the things which belonged to its peace.

The Christian Church was founded on principles which give no excuse for the repetition of the mistake. Relationship to the Lord Jesus is the secret of life, and that relationship is determined by the doing of the will of His Heavenly Father.¹ Faith in Jesus Christ is

¹ St. Matt. xii. 50.

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the condition of salvation,¹ love of Him is the essence of discipleship,² abiding in Him is the secret of fruit-bearing.³ Institutionalism is not ignored, but it is extremely simple, and manifestly provided for the assistance of the spiritual relationship. The gospel is not the good news that the Sacraments save us, if only we have faith to make them operative ; but it is the good news that whosoever believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life.⁴ It is primarily their function of quickening and confirming our faith in Jesus that constitutes the Sacraments means of grace. For the highest possible work of grace in the human heart is the production and perpetuation of a living faith in the Redeemer, and the consequent participation in His character ; and it is because the Sacraments are the Divinely appointed signs of His grace and seals of the Covenant promises, that they are so intimately related to this work of grace. As the ordered means of giving visibility to the gifts which they

¹ St. John iii. 16.

² St. John xiv. 15, 21, 23.

³ St. John xv. 4 ff.

⁴ Cf. Gal. v. 6 ; Eph. i. 12 ff.

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signify, they bring the powers of sight, sense, and touch to the help of faith. For illustration of this order of things in the teaching of the Lord, it should be sufficient to quote the words, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved : he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.*¹ The centrality of faith is here indisputably asserted, and, by implication, the centrality among the means of grace of that which first leads to, and constantly nourishes faith ; that is to say, the message of the gospel. And it is because of their relation to the Word that the Sacraments, as *verba visibilia*, are effectual means of grace where the Word is known and accepted. The institutionalism of the gospel is subordinate to the gospel itself and to the faith which responds to it and is produced by it.²

When we turn to St. Paul's teaching, we find the same order. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through*

¹ St. Mark xvi. 16.

² Cf. Gal. iii. 26 f.

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love ;¹ and this is the condition of human experience which corresponds to the new creation.² Now what an opportunity the Apostle flung away here, if he regarded institutionalism as the central thing in Christianity ! Why did he not mention Baptism as being the Christian ordinance which corresponds to circumcision ? The same centralising of faith is exhibited in his words, *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness ; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*³ Again, when the Apostle recounts his Jewish claims and privileges, and renounces them as worse than useless to him as a Christian, it is not the institutions of Christianity that he substitutes for the institutions of Judaism, but the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the gaining of Christ, the being found in Him, the possession of the righteousness which is through faith in Him, the knowledge of the power of Christ's resurrection and of the fellowship of His sufferings.⁴

¹ Gal. v. 6.

² Cf. Gal. vi. 15.

³ Rom. x. 10.

⁴ See Phil. iii. 4 ff.

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With teaching such as this before men's eyes, it might have been expected that the Church would never fall into the error of subordinating the experimental in religion to the institutional. And yet it was just this that reduced Christianity in mediæval times to matters of form and ceremony. The Reformation of the sixteenth century effected the deliverance of a considerable portion of the Western Church from this error : the old conflict between prophet and priest was revived, and the Church was rent over it. The battle still continues : it is represented in our own day by the conflict of the principles and ideals of Evangelicalism and Sacerdotalism. As far as English Christianity is concerned, we may well believe that the light and liberty which were won for us at the Reformation will effectively prevent any national return to the darkness and superstition of the mediæval Church ; and yet as long as the institutional aspect of the gospel is presented to men after the manner of mediæval thought, and the true relation of the Sacra-

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ments to the Word on the one hand, and to faith on the other, is not perceived, for so long will the old conflict between prophet and priest have its counterpart in the experience of the Church.

3. THE DEMAND.

The repudiation by the prophet of the false conception of religion is followed by a statement of the true conception. God does not accept pools of blood and rivers of oil as means of escape from a life of equity and fellowship with Himself. Blood and oil may be the accepted means of approach for a penitent spirit, but they are no substitutes for morality. God's requirements consist in an attitude of heart and will towards our fellow-men and Himself, and a life which corresponds to that attitude.

In respect of our fellow-men He asks us *to do justly and to love mercy*, that is to say, to be both righteous and good.¹ Justice is

¹ For the distinction, see Rom. v. 7. It is the difference between the attitude which expresses itself by the

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not to be sacrificed to kindness, but it is to be enlarged by it. The doing of justice is to be no niggardly submission to legal code, but it is to be expanded into the generous expression of a heart which loves mercy. Taught and inspired by our experience of Divine mercy we have not merely to show mercy but to love it, to set our affection on the finding out of matters in which we can forget the wrong suffered, and seek to do the best for our neighbour instead of pressing home advantage for ourselves.

The other side of God's demand is that we shall walk humbly with Him. This means a life of fellowship and communion in which we recognise His wisdom and submit to His will, sinking our own desires when they conflict with His claims, and accepting Him always and in everything as our Lord, our Owner, our Guide, our Master.

The judgment which was to fall upon Judah was not a judgment upon erroneous question, "What must I do for others?" and that expressed by, "What can I do?"

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belief or irregularities of institutional religion, but upon conduct which was inconsistent with the first principles of religion (vers. 10-12). The nature of the punishment was to be such that the very conduct which was prompted by ideas of self-pleasing would completely fail to bring any satisfaction. Labour would have no reward, and the issue would be nothing but loss and deprivation (vers. 13-15). So was Judah to learn that the supreme fact in life is God, and that the supreme necessity is that of character and conduct which are in some degree the reflection of the Divine.

VIII

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHILD
OF GOD

MICAH vii.

VIII

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHILD OF GOD

I. CONFESSION.

THE first stage in the return of the sinner to God is conviction of guilt and need, which expresses itself in confession. The Prodigal had to *come to himself*.¹ What a pregnant expression! The man has not been himself, he has not allowed liberty of action to those parts of his nature which were given for the purpose of control, his conduct has not been the expression of his true being. He is like a man who acts in his sleep without the dictation of conscience and will, or who has rendered himself temporarily irresponsible by subjecting his mental activities to the soporific influence of a drug. The sinner

¹ St. Luke xv. 17.

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has to learn that, when he permits the higher parts of his nature to be dominated by the appetites of the flesh, he is denying his manhood, and that he needs to come to himself.

There are many and varied ways in which the conviction is produced. For some it is the result of affliction, the consequence, it may be, of the overthrow of the things which were held to count, or of the withdrawal of blessings, the enjoyment of which was taken as a matter of course. For others it comes through the failure to find satisfaction in the life from which God has been excluded. Others come to themselves through being confronted with some manifestation of Divine power, as was the case with the jailer at Philippi.¹ The change takes place in others through the vision of the Lord Jesus, as it did in the experience of Saul of Tarsus.² However varied the means may be, the same conviction of guilt and need is for all alike the first stage in the process of repentance.

¹ Acts xvi. 30.

² Gal. i. 16.

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In this closing chapter of Micah's prophecy a section of the people of Judah is represented as passing through this experience. The message of judgment has not been delivered in vain. *Woe is me ! I have sinned against the LORD* is their cry (vers. 1-9). And what a description the prophet has to give of the condition of the nation, as he muses within himself ! What a confession he has to make ! The faithful among them are so few that he can compare them only with the gleanings after the fruit has been gathered. The nation as a whole has turned away from God, and righteousness is hard to find. Violence and robbery are the rule. All alike are diligent in doing evil, and the men of position and influence lead in the way. Treachery and deceit are rampant : they contaminate even the most sacred of social relationships (vers. 1-6). But there is a faithful remnant of the people which is convicted of the national guilt, and conscious of the national need : and the prophet speaks as their representative.

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2. FAITH.

After conviction comes faith, the attitude of heart and mind towards God which carries with it repentance, confession, prayer, trust, and obedience.

But as for me, I will look unto the LORD (ver. 7).

The words are an anticipation of the description of the Prodigal's return, *he arose and came unto his father*.¹ They imply repentance and confession: repentance, because the Godward look involves the turning of the back upon sin; confession, because the look is the expression of the sense of need.

I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me.

The words are an expression of the confidence which comes of a prayerful trust and obedience. What an inspiring insight into the state of mind of a true believer! He looks to the Lord, prays to the Lord, waits for the Lord, trusts in the Lord. This is his

¹ St. Luke xv. 20.

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portion, the secret of peace in the midst of trouble, the condition of pardon and power.

My God will hear me. Faith finds no difficulty in the conception of prayer being answered. The believer's philosophy of prayer is exceedingly simple, and at the same time amply sufficient. As it is reasonable and natural for a child to bring his needs to his father, and for the father to hear and answer his child's requests, according to his greater knowledge and experience, even so it is reasonable and natural for the child of God to pray to his Heavenly Father with the assurance that the prayer will be heard and answered in accordance with Divine love and wisdom.¹ Faith requires no other explanation of prayer than this. The belief that God is carries with it the assurance that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.²

Micah's faith made no demand for such an answer to his prayer as would secure for him immunity from trouble and freedom from chastisement. On the contrary, his

¹ Cf. St. Luke xi. 11 ff.

² Heb. xi. 6.

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unhesitating confidence in God's will and power to save was accompanied by an uncomplaining resignation to suffering and a filial submission to discipline.

Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise ; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him ; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me : he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness (vers. 8-9).

Triumphant faith indeed in the hour of difficulty and defeat ! The fall is only a claim to restoring grace ; darkness is only a claim to the provision of light. The one thing which the believer cannot claim is the absence of trial : he must recognise the fact of the righteous indignation of the LORD. We have sinned : therefore we must expect to pass through the purifying fire,¹ to receive the chastisement which is the evidence of the Father's love,² and to experience the cleansing which is the

¹ Cf. Mal. iii. 3.

² Heb. xii. 7 ff.

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condition of bearing more fruit.¹ It may be that we do not sufficiently realise the sinfulness of sin and the holiness of God, or that we need to be saved from self-esteem and self-reliance: but whatever the cause may be, we shall, like St. Peter,² have to pass through bitter experiences, the very sifting processes of Satan, the hours of the power of darkness, before we are ready to do the work which lies in front of us, and are prepared to fulfil the destiny which God has set before us. When the day of trouble comes, may it find us, as it did the Prophet Micah, ready to acknowledge the love which has permitted the trial,³ and to trust in the grace which can bring us through it.⁴

3. HOPE.

In the next few verses (10-17) we have a picture of the reward of faith. In the day when the LORD executes judgment for His

¹ St. John xv. 2.

² St. Luke xxii. 31.

³ Cf. Ps. cxix. 75; Rom. v. 3 ff.

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. x. 13; Heb. iv. 16.

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own, unbelief will be put to shame, the taunting challenge will receive its answer, faith will find its vindication (ver. 10). The suffering of discipline will give way to happiness and prosperity (vers. 11-13). The manifestation of God's power will make His people an object not of envy merely, but also of fear to the nations of the world (vers. 14-17).

In this prediction of the victory, restoration, and prosperity of Judah, Micah stands before us once again ¹ as a man of hope, and illustrates incidentally another characteristic of the child of God. The two qualities of hope and faith are linked together in the closest possible connection. Without faith, hope would have no substance,² and, without hope, faith would lack its natural fruit.³ If faith is necessary to hope as its source and cause, hope is necessary to faith as its product and completion.

When faith is man's response to the revelation of God, the hope which it pro-

¹ Cf. ch. ii. 12 f., iv., v.

² Heb. xi. 1.

³ Rom. xv. 13.

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duces is not an indefinite expectation of possibilities, but a confident assurance of future certainties. In this connection hope loses all the element of uncertainty which often attaches to it, and becomes a definite, unhesitating confidence in respect of things that are to be.

Such was the hope of Micah. He was a man of hope because he was a man of faith, and he was a man with a definite, assured hope because his faith was built upon revelation, and rested in the *God of hope*.¹

And now, with Micah's experience as our guide, let us consider the functions which hope fulfils in the life of the child of God. We shall have no difficulty in perceiving three, when we remember that the prophet had to endure trials, to accomplish a ministry, and to live for the future. In all three respects it would be true to say that his hope was his salvation.²

Micah had *to endure trials*. There is a sense in which affliction may be said to

¹ Cf. Rom. xv. 13; 1 Pet. i. 21.

² Cf. Rom. viii. 24.

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produce hope,¹ for it assists a man to set his affection on the things which are to be rather than upon the things which are, and hope, like many other qualities, increases with exercise; but it is also true that hope is the secret of endurance. The absence of hope is one of the surest causes of defeat. The man who endures to the end is one who can say with the Psalmist, *My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*²

We are not surprised to find salvation by hope as one of the leading ideas of the Epistle to the Hebrews, seeing that the epistle was written for the purpose of encouraging Hebrew Christians during the severe trials of the transition period, when the New Covenant was being established in the place of the Old. The writer exhorts them to hold fast their boldness and the glorying of their hope firm unto the end,³ and to shew diligence unto the fulness of hope to the end.⁴ He reminds them that they have the promise and the oath of God

¹ Cf. Rom. v. 3 f.

² Ps. cxix. 81.

³ Heb. iii. 6.

⁴ Heb. vi. 11.

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for their comfort, seeing that they have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, which they have as an anchor of the soul, a hope sure and stedfast.¹ Patience, then, is one of the fruits of hope.²

But Micah had also *to accomplish a ministry*. He had to go on warning, exhorting, and teaching, while all the time the work seemed to be in vain. It was his hope which was the secret of his patient continuance.

St. Paul possessed the same secret. Was there ever a combination of circumstances more calculated to dishearten and depress a man, whose work was that of an apostle, teacher, preacher, and ambassador, than those which beset him as a prisoner in Rome? Think of the restriction, the fetters, the fate hanging over his head, and the malicious devices of the false brethren! Yet amid it all he remained a man of joy and confidence, and continued to accomplish whatever ministry was open to him

¹ Heb. vi. 18 f.

² Cf. Rom. xii. 12; 1 Thess. i. 3.

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through lip and pen. The Apostle's secret lies revealed before anyone who will take the trouble to read his prison letters : it can be summed up in one phrase, *my earnest expectation and my hope*.¹

In the third place, Micah had *to live for the future*, not in the sense of personal continuance after death, but in that of national revival after judgment. He had to interpret present experience in the light of revealed purpose, and to set his affection on the things which were to be. This he was able to do because he was a man of hope : he both possessed hope as a feature of his character and rejoiced in a hope as an element in his creed.

Perhaps the most illuminating example of this aspect of hope is the attitude of Abraham towards God's promise of Isaac, when he *in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be. And without being weakened in faith he considered his*

¹ Phil. i. 20.

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*own body now as good as dead . . . and the deadness of Sarah's womb : yea, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*¹

What hope did for Abraham and Micah, in the restricted sense in which they were able to live for the future, that it can do now for the child of God, for whom Jesus Christ *abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel.*² If we are to live for the future, as it is now revealed unto us, we must put on *for a helmet the hope of salvation.*³

4. PRAISE.

It is not surprising that the statement of Micah's hope should close with a doxology (vers. 18-20). Faith in God always leads to praise, because the hope of the child of

¹ Rom. iv. 17 ff.

² 2 Tim. i. 10.

³ 1 Thess. v. 8.

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God never makes him ashamed.¹ Micah praises God for His forgiving love, His redeeming power, and His faithfulness to His word.

He praises God in the first place for His forgiving love ; and this is the most wonderful feature of the revelation of God.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

Natural religion ends with the conception of God as an object of fear. Men find themselves confronted with the forces of earth, air, fire, and water, forces infinitely greater than any which they themselves possess, and through these they perceive the majesty and sovereignty of God, but they hardly get beyond the idea of a Being who has to be humoured and propitiated. When St. Paul lays his indictment against the heathen world, he charges idolaters with failure to perceive, by the things that are made,

¹ Rom. v. 5.

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God's eternal power and divinity,¹ but in respect of the knowledge of God he does not go beyond that. It is to revelation that men owe their conception of the love of God, faintly understood as an attribute by members of the Old Covenant, but now seen in the person of the Incarnate Son to be the very essence of the Divine Nature. We now know not merely that God is loving and that He loves us, but also the far deeper truth that God is love.² Love is as truly of the essence of God's nature as are holiness and faithfulness. And this means, for all who are willing to have it, the forgiveness of sins.³ If Micah could believe this and praise God for it, how much more can we who rejoice in the revelation of Jesus Christ?

In the second place, Micah praises God for His redeeming power.

He will turn again and have compassion upon us ; he will tread our iniquities under foot ; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

¹ Rom. i. 20.

² 1 John iv. 7 f.

³ Rom. v. 8.

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This is something more than forgiveness : it is the deliverance of man from the dominion of sin. Divine love will never stop short at forgiveness.¹ Pardon is only the first step towards salvation. God forgives man in order to make him holy.² Holiness is the condition of forgiveness, not in the sense of being its cause, but as being its purpose. On God's side, the revelation of pardon is the guarantee at the same time of power ; on man's side, the willingness to be set free from the power of sin is an essential element in faith, and an indispensable qualification for the enjoyment of pardon. If a man is unwilling to fulfil the Divine purpose he disqualifies himself for the standing in Divine grace. The acceptance of forgiveness carries with it the obligation to become holy. The Prodigal was accepted, pardoned, restored, without any bargaining as to the future ;³ but the return was the promise of a worthy sonship, and the welcome was the guarantee

¹ Rom. v. 8 ff., viii. 32 ff.

² Eph. ii. 8 ff.

³ St. Luke xv. 20.

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of the perpetual bestowal of the privileges of the home. The unmerciful servant was pardoned wholly and solely because of the master's grace ; but he refused subsequently to live a life of worthy response, and the grace was withdrawn.¹ The goodness of God leads men to repentance,² and the mercies of God lead men to holiness.³

In the last place the prophet praises God for His faithfulness.

Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Man may be faithless, but God abideth faithful ; He cannot deny Himself.⁴ Judgment may have to fall, and the fulfilment of the promises may have to wait ; but God's word will not return to Him void, what He has said He will assuredly perform.⁵

The faithfulness of God is usually associated with His promises, and it is so here.

¹ St. Matt. xviii. 23 ff.

² Rom. ii. 4.

³ Rom. xii. 1.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

⁵ Cf. Hab. ii. 2 ff.

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But it is well to remind ourselves that God has given to us words of warning as well as of promise, and that His faithfulness applies to the one as well as to the other. It was exemplified as much in the destruction of the unbelievers through the Flood as in the salvation of Noah through the Ark; and as much in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans as in the Return of the Jews from Babylon. But here it is linked up to the promises; and it was because Micah was able to praise God for His faithfulness that he continued to be a man with a sure and steadfast hope in the midst of circumstances which were apparently hopeless.

In Micah's doxology, then, we can find the incentive and inspiration for our own times of darkness and difficulty, whether personal or national. It is just in so far as we can rejoice in the pardoning love of God, in His power to set us free from the bands of our sins, and in His faithfulness to His word and promise, that we can, filled with all joy and peace in believing, abound

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in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.¹ But we must see to it that we cultivate not only the hope which patiently endures trial and waits on the Lord for deliverance, but also that which actively co-operates with God in service and sacrifice, and sets its affection on those good things which pass man's understanding, but are revealed unto us by the Spirit, the things which God hath prepared for them that unfeignedly love Him.

¹ Rom. xv. 13.

APPENDIX

IN times of national crisis the writings of the Canonical Prophets seem to acquire a fresh significance and value. The reason is not far to seek. The Prophets were the messengers of God to the Church of the Old Covenant. But, under the Old Covenant, Church and Nation were identical. Israel was a religious commonwealth, and expressed its national life through the ordinances and institutions of its religion. And consequently the Prophets were ultimately concerned in their ministry, not with individuals, nor with sections of the community, but with the nation. It was of the nation that they thought, to the nation that they spake, for the nation that they worked.

This feature of the ministry of the Prophets could not be reproduced in the

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work of the Apostles. Israel as a nation had rejected Christ; and the Church of the New Covenant had to be gathered out of every nation, and to consist of all tribes and peoples and tongues. And consequently the majority of the Epistles are addressed either to local companies of believers or to individuals. Even the "Catholic Epistles" had readers in view whose demarcation was determined by their Christian profession. No writing of the New Testament is addressed to a church which was co-extensive and identical with a nation or empire. The Apostolic writings record teaching for Christians as distinguished from unbelievers; the Prophetical writings record teaching for Judah and Israel (either separately or in combination) as distinguished from other nations.

It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that in times such as the present, when under the pressure of circumstances the scope of our thoughts is enlarged, and we are compelled to pay heed to the life and soul of the nation, men discover new value in the

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words of warning or comfort which were delivered by these guardians of Israel's religion, monitors of Israel's morality, watchmen of Israel's destiny.

If, at the time of the National Mission in England, this little volume is permitted to take any part in stimulating and directing the study of the teaching of one of these messengers to a nation, its publication will have fulfilled its purpose.

There are many sources from which help in the study of the Book of Micah can be obtained by an English reader.

Of these mention may be made here of the following :

Calvin's Commentary (English translation by Owen, 1847). Copies of this can be found in most libraries. It is an illuminating guide to practical application based on careful interpretation.

Pusey's Commentary on the Minor Prophets (1869). A forceful exposition, with the added virtue of providing a wide field of Bible study.

Bishop Christopher Wordsworth's Com-

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mentary on the Bible (1871); F. C. Cook, in the "Speaker's Commentary" (1876); *The One-Volume Commentary* (J. R. Dummelow, 1909).

The brief exposition by Dr. Cheyne in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (1893) offers valuable help in the study of the original meaning of the text.

The Doctrine of the Prophets, by Dr. Kirkpatrick (1892), is of great assistance to a knowledge of the circumstances and message of the Prophet. It does not contain an exposition of the text.

Dr. G. A. Smith, in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* ("The Expositor's Bible," 1896), exhibits his characteristic power of making the message of the Prophets a living one for our own day.

For advanced critical study, Dr. J. M. P. Smith in the "International Critical Commentary" (1912) should be consulted.

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